

What Your Board Really Wants to Know (And How to Share It With Confidence)

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Let's be real. Standing in front of your board can feel like standing under a spotlight. You've got leaders staring at you, waiting for answers. Your stomach is tight. Your palms are sweaty. And you're wondering—"Do I even know what they really want to hear?"

If you've ever felt nervous, stumbled over your words, or watched board members glance down at their phones, you are not alone. Many nonprofit leaders, executive directors, and even seasoned managers wrestle with this exact pain.

Here's the good news: once you understand *what your board truly cares about*—and how to share it—you can walk into that room with confidence, clarity, and even excitement. Let's break it down using simple language, real-life examples, and step-by-step solutions.

Why Board Presentations Often Go Wrong

Let's start with the hard truth: many board meetings turn into information overload. Leaders bring in piles of spreadsheets, long reports, or scattered updates. What happens? Board members zone out. The energy drops. And the mission of your organization gets lost in the noise.

Here are some common mistakes that cause confusion:

- Too much data, not enough story. Dumping numbers without explaining what they mean leaves your board confused.
- No clear focus. You try to cover everything, so nothing really sticks.
- Talking in "finance language." Not every board member understands debits, credits, or complex KPIs.
- Fear of tough questions. You avoid sensitive topics like cash flow or staff shortages, but the board can sense it.
- Poor visuals. Tiny font slides and cluttered graphs make it hard to follow along.

When this happens, board members may lose trust. They start wondering if leadership really knows what's going on. And that's when stress skyrockets—for you and for them.

What Happens If You Don't Fix This?

Here's the scary part. If you don't learn how to communicate clearly with your board, bigger problems show up:

- **Funding can dry up.** A confused or worried board may hesitate to approve budgets, fundraising strategies, or new programs.
- **Trust breaks down.** Without clear updates, the board may second-guess leadership. They might even start micromanaging.
- **Opportunities get missed.** When your message isn't clear, your board can't advocate for you with donors, partners, or the community.
- Stress spreads. Staff sense the tension. Morale dips. Momentum slows down.

Imagine this: A nonprofit had a chance to apply for a \$500,000 grant. The board needed confidence in the numbers to sign off. But the financials were confusing, the presentation dragged on, and trust wobbled. The deadline passed. Opportunity lost. That kind of pain is real—and preventable.

Here's Your Game Plan: Share What the Board Really Wants to Know

Your board doesn't need *everything*. They need the **right things**—presented with clarity, confidence, and care.

Here are the top areas your board truly cares about:

- 1. **Financial health.** Are we bringing in enough money to cover expenses? How's cash flow? Are there risks we need to know?
- 2. **Mission impact.** How are we changing lives? What's the story behind the numbers?
- 3. **Progress on goals.** Are we on track with the strategic plan, programs, and major initiatives?
- 4. **Risks and challenges.** Don't hide the tough stuff. Be honest about problems—and show your plan to solve them.
- 5. **Opportunities.** Where can we grow? Are there grants, partnerships, or new programs worth exploring?

When you focus on these, your board feels engaged, respected, and equipped to make decisions.

Step 1: Prepare the Right Data

Gather the numbers and stories that matter most. Don't drown your board in spreadsheets—curate what's essential.

Examples:

- Instead of listing every expense, show *program vs. admin costs* in a simple pie chart.
- Instead of 10 pages of donor names, highlight the *growth in new donors vs. repeat donors*.
- Instead of raw survey data, share one powerful quote from a client about how your program changed their life.

Use visuals—charts, graphs, and pictures. People remember stories, not spreadsheets.

Step 2: Use Simple Language

Boards are often made up of smart people with different backgrounds. Some know finance. Others know marketing, law, or community service. Don't assume they all speak "accounting."

Swap jargon for plain talk:

- Say "money coming in" instead of "revenues."
- Say "money going out" instead of "expenditures."
- Say "extra money left over" instead of "net income."

The clearer your words, the more confident your board will feel.

"Your board doesn't need every detail—they need the right details, told with clarity and confidence."

Step 3: Tell the Story Behind the Numbers

Numbers are important—but numbers alone don't inspire. Connect them to your mission.

Example: Instead of just saying, "We served 325 families," tell the story of one mom who found safe housing because of your program. Put a face to the figure. That's what sticks in your board's hearts.

Step 4: Deliver with Confidence

Confidence doesn't mean you need to be perfect. It means you prepare, you practice, and you breathe.

Tips to shine:

- Stand tall and make eye contact.
- Practice with a friend or in front of a mirror.
- Smile—it makes you more approachable.
- Pause. Silence can be powerful. Don't rush through your words.

When you relax, your board relaxes too.



Step 5: Welcome Questions and Feedback

Don't fear questions—invite them! Questions mean your board is engaged. Here's how to handle them with grace:

- Listen fully. Don't interrupt. Let them finish.
- Repeat back. "So what I hear you asking is..." This shows respect and ensures you understood.
- Answer honestly. If you don't know, say so. Promise to follow up—and then do it.

Action Steps for Your Next Board Meeting

- Pick 3–5 key metrics your board truly cares about.
- Turn at least one metric into a simple chart or graph.
- Write one client or community story that connects numbers to impact.
- Practice your presentation out loud—time yourself.
- Plan one slide or handout with "Next Steps" so the board knows how to help.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What does my board really want to know?

Your board wants to know if the organization is healthy, making an impact, and moving toward its goals. They don't need every detail—they need the big picture, told clearly.

2. How can I share information with confidence?

Prepare well, practice out loud, and focus on the most important points. Confidence grows with clarity and preparation.

3. What if I get a question I can't answer?

It's okay! Be honest. Say, "I don't have that number with me, but I'll follow up." Then make sure you do.

4. How often should I update my board?

At least quarterly, and more often if there are major changes or urgent issues. Boards want to feel informed, not surprised.

5. How can I build trust with my board?

Be transparent. Share wins and challenges. Invite feedback. Show that you listen and take action on their concerns.

Final Thoughts

Sharing with your board doesn't have to be scary. When you focus on what really matters—financial health, mission impact, progress, risks, and opportunities—you'll transform those meetings. Your board will feel engaged. You'll feel confident. And together, you'll move your mission forward.

Remember: your board doesn't expect perfection. They expect honesty, clarity, and leadership. You've got this.

Take Action &

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ABOUT US



We empower churches and ministries throughout the country to take charge of their finances. Our job is to "clean house" by helping ministries get their finances organized to prepare for God's increase in their ministry.

With our help, churches know exactly where their finances stand at all times, and keep everything organized so that, when God puts an opportunity in their path, the financials are ready and senior management can move forward with their plans.

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> Joe Wyrostek Metro Praise International Chicago IL

Belinda Whitfield Certified Public Accountant

